

let them know that I care and will work my hardest to help them. We must remember that no matter how dirty, smelly, unpleasant, or hateful patients are, they have come to us because they are in need. And that dirtball might just be the medical student who rotates through the emergency room next month.

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Deficiencies in Soviet Medicine

TO THE EDITOR: Having read the letter from Drs Rafferty and Schultz¹ commenting on Friedenberg's article on the Soviet health care system,² I was encouraged to re-read that article. I had the pleasure and honor of following Drs Rafferty and Schultz as an exhibit physician into Tbilisi, Soviet Georgia, for two months; they had served at Kiev and Rostov.

I, too, feel that Dr Friedenberg is unnecessarily kind in his assessment of Soviet medical care and, in some instances, in error.

The examples of deficiencies in Soviet medicine are too numerous to mention in a letter, and in this sense they reflect exactly what is going on in the rest of Soviet society. It may be simpler just to say that in no respect does their system, in its philosophy or execution, serve as a model for anyone else's. Nor, at this time, are its foundations or accomplishments

sufficient to be the basis for improvement. Just as the rest of their society has stagnated, so has their health care system.

It may very well be, as Drs Rafferty and Schultz point out, that Soviet health expenditures are 2% of their gross national product. The real cost in mortality and morbidity and the unmeasured cost and effort of trying to circumvent the system to obtain decent care could easily push that figure into double digits, however.

We must help our Soviet colleagues in every way we can. This cannot be accomplished until the *glasnost*, which is the essence of scientific intercourse, is allowed to permeate this until now impenetrable border, mind and soul. This effort is not at all abetted by abrogating our usual high standards of criticism, which began with the Flexner report. Would that it were applied to Soviet medicine.

Dr Friedenberg is doing a disservice to our Soviet brethren by permitting them to compare their present standards to their past accomplishments and not to present-day western ones. Even by their own standards, they have regressed. Free care is the hubris on which the Soviets base their criticism of our system. For Dr Friedenberg to grab their banner, knowing full well the real cost of free care, is to gloss over the failure of the system, which has done very little in 70 years except to remain nominally free.

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